



Tysha Owens – Acting Warden
Nova Institution for Women
180 James Street
Truro, Nova Scotia B2N 6R8

August 26th 2026

Re: CAEFS Regional Advocacy Visit, July 2026

Dear Tysha,

We want to thank the Institutional Management Team at Nova Institution for Women (Nova) for taking the time to meet with our Atlantic Regional Advocacy Team on July 27, 2026.

This letter summarizes reports received and conditions observed by the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) during our advocacy visits on July 8, 14, and 23. It also includes a summary of the discussion that took place during the July 27 meeting, identifies relevant laws and policies, and sets out CAEFS' recommendations.

Thank you, and we look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

Shelby Thompson
Lead Advocate, Atlantic Regional Advocacy Team, CAEFS



Access to Personal Property and an Empowering Environment

Description: CAEFS received reports that people have been experiencing significant delays in the processing of their personal effects, (commonly known as pen boxes), and subsequently the timeframe in which they receive their belongings is delayed. One individual shared with CAEFS that her box had arrived at Nova Institution in May, and at the time of our visit, ten weeks later, she had still not received these items.

Discussion: Management indicated they are working with Admissions and Discharge (A&D) to address processing delays and have allocated additional staff to handle personal belongings more efficiently, with the goal of reducing the impact of these delays on individuals.

Law and Policy:

CCRA s. 4(d): [People who are incarcerated] retain the rights of all members of society except those that are, as a consequence of the sentence, lawfully and necessarily removed or restricted.

CCRA s.70: The Service shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that penitentiaries, the penitentiary environment, the living and working conditions of [incarcerated persons] and the working conditions of staff members are safe, healthful and free of practices that undermine a person's sense of personal dignity.

CCRR s. 81(2): The Service shall take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety of every [incarcerated person] and that every [incarcerated person] is

- (a) adequately clothed and fed;
- (b) provided with adequate bedding;
- (c) provided with toilet articles and all other articles necessary for personal health and cleanliness;
- (d) given the opportunity to exercise for at least one hour every day outdoors, weather permitting, or indoors where the weather does not permit exercising outdoors.

Recommendation: CAEFS appreciated that Management is working to ensure personal property, including pen boxes, are processed and distributed in a timely manner. Research indicates that a supportive, empowering environment is a key determinant of successful outcomes for federally sentenced women and gender diverse people. Incarcerated individuals should have timely access to adequate clothing, bedding, hygiene items, and other essential personal effects.

Access to Family – Telephone Communication

Description: People reported to CAEFS that due to administrative delays in processing funds, they were unable to communicate with their family for extended periods of time. One individual who arrived at Nova via involuntary transfer from Ontario shared that she waited three weeks to speak with her family on the phone.

People also shared that they are confused as to whom they should be submitting requests for support to, in the absence of the Family Liaison Officer (FLO). Individuals reported that the absence of the FLO has impacted their ability to correspond with family, arrange visitation with children, coordinate family court matters, as well as prevented reintegration planning.



Discussion: Management advised that requests previously directed to the Family Liaison Officer (FLO) will now be handled by the Assistant Warden, Interventions (AWI). They also reported that they are hiring a fourth Social Programs Officer (SPO), who will oversee the Mother-Child Program and assume some responsibilities formerly carried out by the FLO.

Law and Policy:

CCRA s. 4(c): the Service uses the least restrictive measures consistent with the protection of society, staff members and [incarcerated people];

CCRA s. 71(1): In order to promote relationships between [incarcerated persons] and the community, an [incarcerated person] is entitled to have reasonable contact, including visits and correspondence, with family, friends and other persons from outside the penitentiary, subject to such reasonable limits as are prescribed for protecting the security of the penitentiary or the safety of persons

Recommendation: CAEFS recommends CSC communicate clear pathways to accessing family support and ensure the timely processing of funds to prevent unnecessary delays in access to family and community. Delays in communication can have significant impacts on emotional wellbeing and create barriers to managing essential personal affairs, including finances, visits, and legal matters related to children. More broadly, access to family is an essential component of wellness for federally sentenced women and gender diverse people. Too many federally sentenced women are fractured from their families by the conditions of incarceration, with lasting and generational adverse effects.

Conditions of Confinement – Double Bunking

Description: CAEFS continues to receive reports of people who are affected by the prolonged conditions of double bunking. People shared with CAEFS that the lack of privacy and close conditions of confinement is having impacts on peoples mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing.

People reported feeling unsafe when assigned to upper bunks because they exceed the recommended 90 kg weight limit, raising concerns that emergency first aid could not be performed safely if required.

One person who had previously shared concerns regarding the lack of privacy in respect to practicing her religion shared with CAEFS a written response to a complaint she submitted. Within this response, a suggestion was made that if she required privacy for prayer, she should utilize the bathroom. She felt that this suggestion was extremely offensive, and not a suitable accommodation for her right to practice her religion.

Discussion: Management indicated that individuals should not be directed to use a bathroom as a space for sacred prayer and encouraged CAEFS to raise this specific concern directly with them for follow-up.

Law and Policy:

CCRA s. 4 (g): Correctional policies, programs and practices respect gender, ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic differences, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, and are responsive to the special needs of women, Indigenous persons, visible minorities, persons requiring mental health care and other groups



CCRA s.75: An [incarcerated person] is entitled to reasonable opportunities to freely and openly participate in, and express, religion or spirituality, subject to such reasonable limits as are prescribed for protecting the security of the penitentiary or the safety of persons.

CD 550 s. 7: Population management strategies must include single occupancy when feasible and ensure that double bunking remains a temporary accommodation measure.

Recommendation: CAEFS is concerned by the rising number of federally sentenced women and gender diverse people, the increased reliance on double-bunking and the move towards expanding living units, and the resulting harmful impacts on penitentiary environments. These approaches are inconsistent with evidence that most women and gender diverse people can be safely managed in the community at lower cost to Canadians and with better outcomes. CAEFS recommends that CSC prioritize timely reintegration to reduce overcrowding and ensure that community supervision applies the least restrictive measures to prevent unnecessary revocations.

Access to Family – Visits

Description: People shared with CAEFS that currently in Nova, visitation occurs three days per week, with many people expressing their desire for visits to happen more frequently. It was reported that on one recent occasion, all visits were cancelled as the Visiting and Correspondence (V&C) area was being utilized as a cooling unit.

People shared with CAEFS that there is very little privacy between people attending video visits, and in-person visitors, which take place in the same room. One individual expressed concern about staff interruptions during a video visit with her children. She shared that several times throughout the visit uniformed officers came into the camera frame and interrupted the visit, which scared and upset her children. The children subsequently ended the visit early. This individual voiced her concerns to CAEFS, sharing that she felt this was inappropriate.

Discussion: Management advised that limited available space restricts options for addressing privacy concerns in the visitation area. They noted that video visits are managed similarly to in-person visits and indicated that staff presence and interruptions may be unavoidable.

Law and Policy:

CCRA s. 4 (g): Correctional policies, programs and practices respect gender, ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic differences, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, and are responsive to the special needs of women, Indigenous persons, visible minorities, persons requiring mental health care and other groups

CCRA s. 71(1): In order to promote relationships between [incarcerated persons] and the community, an [incarcerated person] is entitled to have reasonable contact, including visits and correspondence, with family, friends and other persons from outside the penitentiary, subject to such reasonable limits as are prescribed for protecting the security of the penitentiary or the safety of persons

CD 599 s. b: ensure visits are available to all [incarcerated individuals]



Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that CSC take steps to ensure meaningful and consistent access to family and community through both in-person and video visitation. This should include minimizing disruptions and cancellations of visits wherever possible, increasing opportunities for visitation where operationally feasible, and implementing measures to enhance privacy and reduce unnecessary interruptions during visits.

CAEFS acknowledges the space limitations identified by management; however, these constraints should not result in barriers to maintaining family relationships. Access to family and community is a critical component of emotional wellbeing and successful reintegration for federally sentenced women and gender diverse people. Particular care should be taken to ensure that visitation practices support positive parent-child relationships and do not inadvertently cause distress to children or discourage ongoing family contact.

Access to Conditional Release

Description: CAEFS received reports that many people are experiencing delays in accessing conditional release. Several individual shared that they were confused as to whether or not they were being supported for parole, while many others were told they would have to consent to delaying their hearing, in order to receive support for parole — often without a clear outline as to why they were being asked to delay or expectations in order to gain support.

One individual shared with CAEFS that she had recently met with her Institutional Parole Officer (IPO) who asked her to delay her parole hearing, as she did not have the required paperwork completed and was leaving for vacation the following day. The IPO explained that if this individual wished to have a positive report, she would have to delay in order to allow the IPO time to do her job. This individual subsequently agreed to delay her parole hearing for one month, for fear of applying without the inclusion of positive feedback from her IPO.

Discussion: Management advised that all requests to postpone parole hearings are reviewed before approval and encouraged individuals who are concerned about or dissatisfied with a request to delay parole to raise the matter directly with the Manager of Assessments and Interventions (MAI).

Law and Policy:

CCRA s. 3(b): assisting the rehabilitation of [incarcerated persons] and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the community.

CCRA s. 100: The purpose of conditional release is to contribute to the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by means of decisions on the timing and conditions of release that will best facilitate the rehabilitation of [incarcerated persons] and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens.

CD s. 700 (5): parole officers will facilitate the reintegration of [incarcerated people] into community at the earliest possible date while ensuring public and staff safety in all case management decisions.

Recommendation: CAEFS recommends that CSC support access to conditional release at the earliest possible opportunity and ensure individuals are provided with clear and transparent information regarding parole processes, expectations, and timelines. Federally sentenced women and gender diverse people achieve the best outcomes



when supported in the community with access to family, cultural connections, and community-based resources, and should not face unnecessary barriers to conditional release.

Population Update

CAEFS would also like to note that the recorded number of incarcerated people at Nova at the time of the management meeting was 123, with 1 person currently incarcerated in the Structured Intervention Unit.

